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Canepa Family: Remo Canepa (Elder)

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REMO CANEPA

The work ethic that Remo Canepa demonstrated in all the endeavors of his life was instilled in him as a child. His mother and father constantly conveyed to him the importance of hard work and dedication. Asked today, Remo says that the best piece of advice he ever received was to “be honest and work hard.” These words imparted by his father were not just words, his father lived them; Remo watched and learned from the examples set before him in his family.

Remo constantly saw his father’s dedication to whatever he did, but one instance stands out above all others. This was the commitment that his father gave to learning English and to overcoming the language barrier. Neither of his parents were citizens of the United States. Learning English was a particular challenge for them. His father was born and raised in Italy, and his mother was born in New Jersey but raised in Italy. They met in Italy and immigrated to Stockton, California in 1922.

At that time, Italians were the second largest group, next to the Germans, in the Stockton area. It seemed that they had arrived in the land of opportunity, where land was readily available. They left behind a country rife with political unrest and economic uncertainty to find a better life for themselves and the future family they hoped to have.

The dream of a better life soon became a reality. Remo’s parents worked hard and before long established themselves, as pillars of the Stockton Italian community. His father became a partner in the Gaia De Lucchi grocery store.

During his first eighteen years Remo Canepa lived the conventional life of an only child. As the apple of his mother’s eye, and the future of the family name, Remo was a source of pride and joy for his parents. They wanted only the best for him, as most parents do. But the day would soon come when he would stand on his own.

That day came when he decided to enlist in the United States Maritime Service. As his mother's adoring smile turned into a worried frown, his father proudly looked on at his only son. The elder Canepa knew that Remo didn't need his protection any longer and hoped that he had instilled in his son the strength and determination that life required. They knew that Remo's decision meant that they might never see him again. And to think, at one time they wouldn't let him play football for fear that he might get hurt.

This time he didn't need their permission; he was old enough to act alone. It was the first, and one of the most important decisions, that Remo made in his life and he marked the beginning of his adult life. He left his family, his home, and his friends to join a new family, the United States Maritime Service, where he would spend the next two years.

When he returned, he thought he had finished his time with the military. However, as fate would have it, he was soon drafted by the U.S. Army to serve in the Korean War. He was extremely surprised by this turn of events but did not shy away from this call to duty. His family was once again devastated, but knew he had to go.

Upon his return, he built upon the information that he learned about the grocery business from his father at a young age and opened a deli in Lodi. Along with running this business, Remo worked as a salesman for a dog food company.

Soon, his entrepreneurial spirit took flight, and he founded a new car wash business, which has since grown to include a second location. Over the years, the business has been modernized, expanded, and has become a highly successful family enterprise. His savvy business mind was not the product of an expensive college education, but of observation, life experience, and dedication.

Though his parents provided guidance and love for him during his childhood years, there was one thing he never got: a sibling. Growing up as an only child can have its benefits and its pitfalls, but even considering its benefits, Remo always desired a brother or sister. So, when starting his own family, he and his wife planned to have at least two children, what they considered a full house. And seven children later, a very full house is exactly what they got.

Today, at the young age of seventy-seven, Remo has not slowed down. He continues to strive to ensure that things run well or to make everything better. He has the luxury of making his own schedule and showing up to work whenever he wants, *if* he wants. And he does show up, even though all his business interests, including both car washes, are managed successfully by his sons and daughters.

This work ethic is what he hopes to pass on to his children and grandchildren. With growing competition in today's workforce, and a higher level of required education, Remo can see that the future will not be easy for his grandchildren. He knows a college education is no longer an advantage but a necessity, and he hopes that his grandchildren will continue their education into college.

Remo Canepa has lived a lifetime of valuable experiences. From his humble beginnings as the child of immigrants, to his service in the United States military, and now as a successful and respected businessman, husband, father, and grandfather, Remo has had an extraordinary life. As he reflects:

"Different things will happen in your life. No one can predict the future so it is important to take the challenges that life gives you and learn from them. If opportunities arise, take that particular gamble. Don't wonder if you are going to be successful—just do it and you'll be successful."

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Interviewer: Jessica Hernandez

Ethnic Group: Italian

Generation: Elder